

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5617

INFO AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

AMEMBASSY CARACAS

USCINCSO

AMCONGEN BELIZE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE GUATEMALA 0373

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, HO, ES, GT

SUBJECT: MEETING OF CENTRAL AMERICAN PRESIDENTS

REF: GUATEMALA 0326 AND 0327

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT LAUGERUD SAID AFTER SANTO TOMAS MEETING HE HAD PROPOSED THAT CENTRAL AMERICAN PRESIDENTS MEET INFORMALLY ONCE A MONTH. LAUGERUD COMMENTED THAT MOST IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENT AT SANTO TOMAS WAS CONSENSUS ON NEED FOR CENTRAL AMERICAN UNITY IN CONFRONTING "APPROACHING ECONOMIC CRISIS." LOCAL PRESS HAS HIGHLIGHTED SALVADOREAN-HONDURAN CORDIALITY AT MEETING AND REPORTS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES THAT CENTRAL AMERICAN CHIEFS OF STATE PLAN TO MEET HERE WITH VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT FEBRUARY 2. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT LAUGERUD, IN AN EBULLIENT MOOD, TOLD
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REPORTERS FOLLOWING THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PRESIDENTS'

MEETING, WHICH WAS LAST-MINUTE ADDITION TO CELEBRATION OF GUATEMALAN NAVY DAY JANUARY 18, THAT HE HAD PROPOSED TO THE OTHER CHIEFS OF STATE AT SANTO TOMAS DE CASTILLA THAT THEY SHOULD MEET TOGETHER AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH. HE STRESSED THAT THE MEETINGS SHOULD BE INFORMAL, FREE FROM PROTOCOL, "WITHOUT BANDS AND CEREMONIES." LAUGERUD EXPRESSED REGRET AT ODUBER'S ABSENCE AT SANTO TOMAS, WHICH HE ATTRIBUTED TO A "PRIOR COMMITMENT" ON THE PART OF THE COSTA RICAN PRESIDENT.

3. LAUGERUD COMMENTED THAT THE MOST IMPORTANT ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE SANTO TOMAS MEETING WAS THE CONSENSUS AMONG THE FOUR PARTICIPANTS THAT "THIS YEAR THE CENTRAL AMERICAN COUNTRIES MUST ACT IN A VERY UNIFIED MANNER TO CONFRONT THE ECONOMIC CRISIS WHICH APPROACHES."

4. GUATEMALAN PRESIDENT ALSO EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EL SALVADOR AND HONDURAS COULD BE RESOLVED DURING 1975. LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE OF THE MEETING HIGHLIGHTED THE OSTENSIBLY FRIENDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN SALVADOREAN PRESIDENT MOLINA AND HONDURAN CHIEF OF STATE LOPEZ. DATT, WHO ATTENDED NAVY DAY CELEBRATIONS, OBSERVED HOWEVER THAT SALVADOREAN AND HONDURAN OFFICIALS SEEMED MORE RESTRAINED IN DEALING WITH EACH OTHER WHEN AWAY FROM VIEW OF PRESS. PUERTO BARRIOS BASE COMMANDER COMMENTED TO DATT THAT LOPEZ AND MOLINA SAT TOGETHER IN SILENCE DURING MOST OF THE TWO HOURS THAT THEY WAITED FOR ARRIVAL OF LAUGERUD. (LAUGERUD, NORMALLY RIGIDLY PUNCTUAL, WAS DELAYED BY AIRCRAFT DIFFICULTIES.) DATT ALSO NOTED THAT SALVADOREAN AND HONDURAN DEFENSE MINISTERS TREATED EACH OTHER COOLLY PRIOR TO ENTERING CLOSED DOOR MEETING WITH GUATEMALAN DEFENSE MINISTER RUBIO.

5. GUATEMALAN PRESS HAS GIVEN CONSIDERABLE PLAY TO ARTICLES APPEARING IN SAN SALVADOR AND SAN JOSE PRESS THAT THE SIX PRESIDENTS OF CENTRAL AMERICA AND PANAMA PLAN TO MEET WITH VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT PEREZ ON FEBRUARY 2 DURING THE LATTER'S BRIEF STOPOVER IN GUATEMALA EN ROUTE TO MEXICO. GUATEMALAN OFFICIALS HAVE DECLINED TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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COMMENT PUBLICLY ON THESE REPORTS.

6. PRESS HERE MADE NO MENTION OF THE APPARENTLY LAST-MINUTE NATURE OF THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE SANTO TOMAS MEETING. DATT WAS TOLD BY OFFICIALS AT THE PUERTO BARRIOS AND SANTO TOMAS BASES THATY THEY WERE NOT INFORMED UNTIL THE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 17 THAT THE OTHER CENTRAL AMERICAN PRESIDENTS WOULD ATTEND NAVY DAY

CEREMONIES.

7. COMMENT: PRESIDENT LAUGERUD CLEARLY ENJOYS SUMMIT DIPLOMACY AND INTENDS TO DO MORE OF IT. DURING SIX MONTHS IN OFFICE, LAUGERUD HAS MET WITH HIS CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLEAGUES THREE TIMES, IN MARKED CONTRAST TO HIS PREDECESSOR, CARLOS ARANA, WHO PREFERRED TO HOLD OCCASIONAL BILATERAL SESSIONS WITH OTHER CENTRAL AMERICAN PRESIDENTS, AND NEVER MET WITH THEM AS GROUP. SANTO TOMAS MEETING WAS NOT JUST FOR GOOD FELLOWSHIP, HOWEVER; GOG CONSIDERS US TRADE ACT IMPORTANT AND WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT ITS REACTION WAS ON SAME TRACK WITH OTHER CAS (REFTELS).

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